



First Lady Maria Shriver Minerva Seal History

March 2006

First Lady Maria Shriver introduced the “Minerva Awards” at the 2004 California Governor and First Lady’s Conference on Women and Families. The award is bestowed on California women whose indisputable humanitarian qualifications demonstrate the enduring power of great acts of service.

The First Lady chose the Minerva Seal which was designed by California artist, Susan Shelton. “Minerva is symbolic of the multiple roles women play in the lives of our families and communities – and in the lives of Californians,” said Maria Shriver.

Minerva is the Roman Goddess of War and Wisdom and is featured on the California State Seal. According to mythology, with her helmet on, Minerva is a tireless warrior; without it she is the goddess of peace. Today, women are warriors in their everyday lives who nurture, protect and fight for the people and causes they hold dear. In her endeavors, Minerva embodies the qualities of courage, wisdom and strength.

The Story Behind the Image

The image on the seal was inspired by a beautiful story about Athena, Minerva’s Greek counterpart. A competition is held amongst all the Gods and Goddesses of Olympus to become the Protector of the City of Athens. The honor will be awarded to the God or Goddess who bestows the greatest gift to the city.

As the competition narrows to the final contenders, Poseidon presents to the city, amidst a great clatter and an impressive parting of the earth, a salt spring and a full fleet of war ships. Following this show stopping display, Athena calmly and confidently kneels to plant a dusty little shrub in the ground. Athena explains to the puzzled citizens that, with the fruit of this tree, they will light their lamps, flavor their foods and beautify their bodies. Further, their artisans will create beautiful vessels to hold oil, thus facilitating trade and bringing wealth.

Realizing that the gift of the olive tree will enrich their lives for generations to come, the citizens proclaim Athena the winner, and name the city in her honor.

About the Artist

Susan Shelton is a sculptor, muralist and ceramic artist. Susan was born in Mexico City to a Mexican mother and a British father, and has lived in California since high school. She and her family have maintained strong ties to the language, people and beauty of her homeland. Many of her works reflect her pride in her Mexican heritage. She strives to create works that connect us to our surroundings and

to one another, and she seeks to explore the cultural, spiritual and aesthetic elements of our common human experience. Susan's art is dynamic and tender, thoughtful and whimsical, big and small.